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Nicholas Temperley, ed. *Music in Britain: The Romantic Age, 1800-1914. The Athlone History of Music in Britain, Vol. 5.* London: The Athlone Press, 1981, xii, 548 pp.

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NICHOLAS TEMPERLEY, ed. *Music in Britain: The Romantic Age, 1800-1914. The Athlone History of Music in Britain*, Vol. 5. London: The Athlone Press, 1981, xii, 548 pp.

In matters of scholarship, it is difficult to escape the notion that volume equals significance. To date, every history of British music has been confined to a single volume. Now, in a grand refutation of the stinging catchphrase "Das Land ohne Musik," the Athlone Press is undertaking the publication of a *History of Music in Britain*, using the munificent mass of six volumes to underscore the point. If the considerable bulk of this first volume in the series to appear is any indication of the size of future volumes, then British music—at least in its scholarly aspect—can be considered to have arrived.

Considering the current romantic revival and, in particular, the recent outpouring of recordings of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British music, it is both timely and appropriate that this first volume should be devoted to the Victorian and Edwardian eras. For years this period of British music was considered, both at home and abroad, to represent the lowest point in a long barren stretch between Purcell and Elgar, a period during which Great Britain could boast of no composer of truly international stature. Next to the masterpieces of European Romanticism she could place only a few stalwart settings of the Anglican service, some part-songs, the odd drawing-room ballad, and, of course, the imperishable Gilbert and Sullivan operettas. As the present plethora of recordings on such relatively new labels as Saga, Pearl, Hyperion, and Lyrita demonstrates, much attractive and valuable music was composed in the British Isles during this period. And although the book makes no claim for having unearthed a neglected Mozart, it does attempt to redress some popular misconceptions and to make a case—a modest one—for the revival of certain works and the reassessment of certain composers who now, perhaps, can be approached without the virulent anti-romanticism of the first part of this century: the chamber music of William Sterndale Bennett, some songs of Stanford and Parry, the church music of S.S. Wesley, and a "precocious" Piano Sonata in D minor, Op. 1, by the little-known Benjamin Dale, to instance a few.

Compared to other histories of British music, this volume takes a wider, more sociological stance. Like Lang's *Music in Western Civilization* the preposition in the title is taken seriously, and instead of the usual chronicle of major and minor figures and their works, the book moves broadly across its subject, viewing music in Britain from four different vantage points, each of which forms the title of a large section. These broad divisions are further divided into twenty-three smaller sub-sections (chapters), each written by a specialist. Nicholas Temperley, the editor, not only provides a helpful orienting introduction, but also the material for several of the better written

chapters. The opening sections contain the bulk of the genuinely new and most interesting material. The first section, *Music in Society*, takes a speculative bird's-eye view of the entire period and examines the impact of Victorian society upon music, while the second, *Popular and Functional Music*, wanders fruitfully through the byways of lower-class popular music little trod by the average musicologist. The third section on *Art Music* is by far the longest and forms the heart of the book, occupying twelve of the twenty-three chapters. The final section, *Writings on Music*, includes chapters on "Aesthetics and Criticism," "Music Theory," and "Musicology,"—the last a superbly written summary by Vincent Duckles.

The book opens with a stimulating chapter by Stephen Banfield entitled "The Artist in Society" in which he outlines the position of the artist in nineteenth-century society and attempts to show why, despite the abundance of musical activity, the creative flame flickered so weakly. Banfield stresses the absence of any substantial support for native composers in England during this period, noting that: "If instead of reflecting society or serving in it as professors and directors of institutions, more composers had had the vision and courage to reform, sublimate, or fly in the face of it, England's musical history might have taken a different course . . ." (p. 17). Such a statement, based upon a highly romantic idea of the nature of creative genius, is dubious at best. But Banfield is fearless and ventures even further out on a limb by concluding that: ". . . only when English composers joined their romantic brethren in other countries and other arts in accepting the opposing forces and the inherent alienation as a source of creativity could artistic regeneration take place and England produce a 'first-rate composer'". (p. 28). Once again the great romantic myth, wherein great personal trials and the flouting of society form the crucible of creative greatness, raises its hoary head. Such a quasi-sociological "proof" is, to say the least, doubtful; for creative genius has appeared in all types of societies, and the special reasons for the long stretch of creative weakness in England are not susceptible of such intellectually facile explanations. "Music in Education" by Bernarr Rainbow and "Music Publishing" by D.W. Krummel complete the opening section on *Music in Society*; both provide handy and informative summaries of their respective topics as well as reasoned observations about their importance to English musical life.

The second section discusses *Popular and Functional Music* and opens with a chapter by Richard Middleton on the "Popular Music of the Lower Classes." Middleton neatly sidesteps the thorny issue of distinguishing between "folk" and "popular" music, preferring instead to refer to all music that is avowedly not "high art" as "the common, everyday music of the lower classes" (p. 64). Much of the information he provides is also contained in Eric D. Mackerness's *A Social History of English Music* (London, 1964); but Middleton's is the stronger treat-

ment. The history of the broadside ballad, the "industrial" folksong, and the music-hall song is engagingly traced and provided with a musical and historical perspective lacking in earlier discussions of the same material. In a similar way, the chapters by Andrew Lamb on the "Music of the Popular Theatre" and by Nicholas Temperley on "Ballroom and Drawing-Room Music" flesh out the somewhat scanty information easily available on the social music of the middle and upper classes. Temperley's chapter includes a sensitive discussion of the drawing-room ballad—that much maligned yet much beloved of forms—which avoids the extremes of special pleading or facile denigration; he also provides suggestive line drawing analyses of several of the more enduring (and endearing) songs.

The section entitled *Art Music* occupies just over half the book; it is also the most variable in quality. Temperley has rightly chosen to include his own chapter on "Cathedral Music" under this heading, and in it he deftly traces the somewhat obscure history of Anglican chant and also discusses the service music of Samuel Wesley, his "natural" son Samuel Sebastian Wesley, Charles Villiers Stanford, and Charles Wood—music well known to aficionados, but otherwise obscure. Temperley's is an insider's view, of one long familiar with the ins and outs of the Anglican tradition, and he provides a well-balanced discussion of his subject, replete with apt and copious musical quotations. Another bright spot is Bruce Carr's chapter on "Theatre Music: 1800-1834" which contains an excellent discussion of the career and contribution of Sir Henry Bishop. On the negative side, Geoffrey Bush's treatment of "Songs" is disappointing in its failure to provide any clear stylistic or historical perspective on this vast and important area. Perhaps the task was too large, too unwieldy; but it is nevertheless impressive how Temperley in his chapter on "Piano Music: 1800-1870" encompasses an equally vast area with a much surer historical grasp.

Thanks to recent recordings, it is now possible to obtain at least a brief glimpse into the world of British orchestral and chamber music before Elgar. It is thus saddening to encounter once again the familiar implicitly appologetic account of the achievements of British composers in these fields. Both Percy Young, writing about "Orchestral Music," and Geoffrey Bush, writing about "Chamber Music," seem fixated upon the issue of the stylistic dependence of British composers upon continental models, especially Mendelssohn and Brahms. As Temperley points out in his introduction, "What other idiom was possible, after all?" (p. 7). Thus Field's early (and relatively weak) piano concertos are given more space than Parry's four and Stanford's seven symphonies combined. Moreover, some of the best orchestral music of the period, including Hamish MacCunn's concert overture *The Land of the Mountain and the Flood*, written at the age of nineteen, and Ethel Smyth's overture to *The Wreckers*, are passed over with only a casual mention that fails to point out the obvious: that these are works of quality, worthy

to stand next to the overtures of Dvorak or the orchestral music of Grieg. (These two fine overtures have been recorded and are available on EMI Greensleeve ED 29 0208 1.) The major landmarks too are merely touched upon with little indication of their significance. Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, for example, is accorded the same coverage as George MacFarren's *Hamlet*.

The chapter on "Orchestral Music" brings out a fundamental, if unavoidable, difficulty encountered in the basic organization of the book: the artificiality of the break at 1914. Although from a larger, continental perspective this date forms as good a terminus as any for the romantic period, with British music it works less well. Many of the best composers of the period, including Elgar, Delius, Vaughan Williams, and John Ireland, were active both before and after the cut-off date, and although it is possible for them to be considered to be more modern than romantic, their contribution to British romanticism fails to emerge. Vaughan William's *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis* (1909) and *Sea Symphony* (1910) are not even mentioned, whereas Delius, despite his "modernisms," is given a full treatment. Given the absence of a clear historical watershed in British music in 1914, a political one was made to serve. By making 1914 the cut-off date, the book unintentionally distorts the importance of some of England's most important and gifted composers.

Any book written by committee (fifteen different writers in all) can hardly avoid some overlappings and inconsistencies of style; this book is no exception. How far an editor should interfere in matters of style is certainly moot, but to a North American reader the book contains vestiges of a style of writing little admired on these shores. The chapters on *Art Music* are regularly larded with phrases in which personal taste masquerades as critical judgement: "Barnett's music ultimately died of its self-effacing politeness" (Nigel Burton, p. 221); "Phrase answers phrase with leaden predictability" (Michael Hurd on Henry Smart, p. 251); "They smell a bit too much of the footlights to be wholly successful as songs" (Geoffrey Bush on Balfe, p. 273); ". . . prefaced by an Allegro moderato and followed by an Allegretto grazioso, both of a blandness quite intolerable in our day . . ." (Bush on Stanford, p. 397). Such comments may be amusing but they are hardly scholarly; in Bush's own words, "they are quite intolerable in our day." Despite these lapses in style and the occasional substitution of voluminous detail for historical perspective, the book as a whole makes a major contribution to the history of British music. Considering the obscurity of much of the music discussed, it would have been helpful to have had some indication of the location of the musical sources, especially those now available in modern edition. The bibliography and index are extensive, a quick check turning up only a few missed items, notably Gerald Norris's 500-page *Stanford: The Cambridge Jubilee and Tchaikovsky* (London, 1980).

Kenneth DeLong